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STATE FOR EEB DAS DHENGEL, SGALLOLGLY, PHAYMOND
STATE PLEASE PASS TO NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
DOE FOR PDAS KFREDRIKSEN, SHANE JOHNSON, TCUTLER, GBISCONTI, EROSSI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ENRG](#) [ECON](#) [PARM](#) [KNNP](#) [PGOV](#) [TRGY](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: U.S. NUCLEAR TEAM VISITS SOUTH INDIA ATOMIC RESEARCH
FACILITY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A six-member delegation from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) visited on March 3-4 the Indira Gandhi Center for Atomic Research (IGCAR) near Chennai as part of a 10-day visit to India that also included a stop in Mumbai to discuss nuclear safety issues with counterparts at the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB). The main purpose of the visit was to discuss nuclear safety issues. At IGCAR, the team toured the 500 MW fast breeder reactor currently under construction, as well as the 10 MW fast breeder test reactor and several research facilities. The visit was a success, and the NRC delegation members were impressed with the "culture of safety" they observed during their visit. End summary.

NRC visits India

¶2. (U) James Lyons, Director of Site and Environmental Reviews in the NRC's Office of New Reactors, led the six-member delegation on its trip to India. The delegation arrived in Mumbai on February 23 for discussions with its counterparts in India's Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) to discuss issues related to nuclear safety. The NRC delegation then traveled to South India to visit IGCAR on March 3-4, located in Kalpakkam, 30 miles south of Chennai. A Consulate Chennai pol/econ officer accompanied the delegation at IGCAR.

Kalpakkam: Home of the Fast Breeder Reactor

¶3. (SBU) The NRC delegation requested to visit IGCAR to observe construction practices for the 500 MW "Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor" (PFBR). The PFBR is based on the French-designed Phoenix Reactor. The 10 MW "Fast Breeder Test Reactor" (FBTR) -- also located at IGCAR -- is also supplying information helpful in the design of the PFBR. (Note: Breeder reactors are designed to produce more fissile material than they consume. End note.) The PFBR will be able to make use of thorium, an element that exists in India in much greater quantities than uranium.

¶4. (SBU) The GOI enterprise Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Ltd. -- mercifully referred to simply as BHAVINI -- is in charge of building the facility. The project's director, Prabhat Kumar, told the NRC delegation that the USD 873 million project will be 34 percent completed by the end of March, slightly behind the project's target of 40 percent. The main cause for the delay, he said, was that the large crane needed to lift the three layers of the reactor containment vessel into the building is not functioning. He alleged that the vendor had essentially cheated BHAVINI by providing a crane that needed significant refurbishment. The vendor, he said, was repairing the crane onsite, which had caused a four-month delay on

some aspects of construction. Kumar said that he may soon decide to hire another crane, which he said was "already packed and sitting on a dock in Hamburg, Germany" waiting for his call. He said that the German crane could be installed and operational within 10 days of its arrival at Kalpakkam.

NRC takes a look at other IGCAR facilities, also

15. (SBU) IGCAR officials also gave the NRC delegation a tour of several other facilities, including the 10 MW Fast Breeder Test Reactor (often referred to as the Kamini reactor), a French design in operation since 1985. One of the reactor's operators told us that the Kamini reactor had been a great success, and provided a great deal of data that had been useful in designing the much larger FBR. The delegation also visited several IGCAR facilities that research materials, designs, and the environmental impact of India's nuclear program.

Comment

16. (SBU) The NRC delegation was impressed by the "culture of safety" it found at IGCAR. The group noted that it was especially interesting to witness firsthand how the Indian nuclear establishment had established safety protocols, designs, and procedures on their own, since the program grew up with very little contact or technology sharing with Western nuclear programs. The NRC delegation was warmly received at all of its stops, and the Indian researchers enthusiastically explained their projects to the group. The visit, the first of its kind by a USG delegation in several years, serves as an excellent example of the kind of constructive, cooperative, mutually beneficial exchanges that could become commonplace if the GOI allows the 123 initiative to move forward. End comment.

17. (U) This message was coordinated with the NRC delegation and Embassy New Delhi.

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